THE BOOK OF CORNELIUS NEPOS

ON THE

GREAT GENERALS OF FOREIGN NATIONS

PREFACE

I DOUBT not, Atticus, that many readers will look upon this kind of writing as trivial and unworthy of the parts played by great men, when they find that I have told who taught Epaminondas music or see it mentioned among his titles to fame that he was a graceful dancer and a skilled performer on the flute.[1] But such critics will for the most part be men unfamiliar with Greek letters, who will think no conduct proper which does not conform to their own habits. If these men can be made to understand that not all peoples look upon the same acts as honourable or base, but that they judge them all in the light of the usage of their forefathers, they will not be surprised that I, in giving an account of the merits of Greeks, have borne in mind the usage of that nation. For example, it was no disgrace to Cimon, an eminent citizen of Athens, to have his own sister to wife,[2] inasmuch as his countrymen followed that same custom; but according to our standards such a union is considered impious. In Crete it is thought praiseworthy for young men to have had the greatest possible number of love affairs.

At Lacedaemon no woman without a husband, however distinguished she may be, refuses to go to a dinner-party as a hired entertainer.[1] Almost everywhere in Greece it was deemed a high honour to be proclaimed victor at Olympia; even to appear on the stage and exhibit oneself to the people was never regarded as shameful by those nations. With us, however, all those acts are classed either as disgraceful, or as low and unworthy of respectable conduct.

On the other hand, many actions are seemly according to our code which the Greeks look upon as shameful. For instance, what Roman would blush to take his wife to a dinner-party? What matron does not frequent the front rooms[2] of her dwelling and show herself in public? But it is very different in Greece; for there a woman is not admitted to a dinner-party, unless relatives only are present, and she keeps to the more retired part of the house called "the women's apartment," to which no man has access who is not near of kin.

But further enlargement of this topic is impossible, not only because of the extent of my proposed work, but also by my haste to treat the subject that I have chosen. I shall therefore come to the point and shall write in this book of the lives of celebrated commanders.

VII. ALCIBIADES

1. Alcibiades, the Athenian, son of Clinias. In this man Nature seems to have tried to see what she could accomplish; for it is agreed by all who have written his biography that he was never excelled either in faults or in virtues. Born in the most famous of cities of a very noble family, he was by far the handsomest man of his time. He was skilled in every accomplishment and of abundant

[1] See note 1, p. 34.

ability (for he was a great commander both on land and sea); in eloquence he was numbered among the best orators, since his delivery and his style were so admirable that no one could resist him. He was rich; energetic too, when occasion demanded, and capable of endurance; generous, magnificent not only in public, but in private, life; he was agreeable, gracious, able to adapt himself with the greatest tact to circumstances: but yet, so soon as he relaxed his efforts and there was nothing that called for mental exertion, his extravagance, his indifference, his licentiousness and his lack of self-control were so evident, that all men marvelled that one man could have so varied and contradictory a character.

2. He was brought up in the home of Pericles (for he is said to have been his step-son [1]), his teacher was Socrates. His father-in-law was Hipponicus, the richest man of all Greek-speaking lands. In fact, if he himself had tried to determine the conditions of his life, he could not have imagined more blessings, or acquired greater advantages, than either Nature or Fortune had bestowed upon him. In early youth he was beloved by many, after the Greek fashion, including Socrates, as Plato mentions in his *Banquet.* For Plato represented him as saying that he had spent the night with Socrates, and had left his bed as a son ought to leave that of his father. When he grew older, he had an equally great number of love affairs, in which he showed great elegance and wit, so far as that was possible in hateful practices;[2] I

[2] Guill.'s transfer of this phrase after *referremus* is ingenious, but calls for *licet* instead of *licitum est*; *odiosa* is doubtless corrupt.

would give an account of these if I did not have other and more important topics.

3. In the Peloponnesian war it was due to his influence and advice that the Athenians declared war on Syracuse; and to conduct that war he himself was appointed general, along with two colleagues, Nicias and Lamachus. In the midst of the preparations, before the fleet sailed, it happened that on one and the same night all the Hermes-pillars [1] in the city of Athens were thrown down except one; that one was before the door of Andocides, and hence it was afterwards called the Mercury [2] of Andocides. Since it was obvious that such an outrage could have been committed only by the common effort of numerous accomplices, and since this seemed to be directed rather against the state than against individuals, the people were filled with great apprehension, fearing the outbreak of some sudden disturbance in the state, designed to overthrow their freedom. 415 B.C.

These suspicions seemed to point especially to Alcibiades, because he was regarded as too powerful and too great to be content with a private station; for he had won the devotion of many men by his generosity, and had made a still greater number his debtors by help in the courts. The result was, that whenever he appeared in public, he drew all eyes upon himself, and no one of the citizens was considered his equal. And so he not only filled them with the highest hopes, but also with profound apprehension, because he was capable of doing a great deal of harm, as well as a great deal of good. His reputa-

[2] The Roman god who was identified with Hermes; cf. note 4, p. 7.

tion was also assailed because it was said that he celebrated the mysteries [1] in his own house, which was impious by the tradition of the Athenians; and it was thought that he did so, not from religious, but revolutionary, motives.[2]

4. It was this charge that was brought against him by his enemies in the public assembly. But the time was at hand for beginning the campaign, and Alcibiades, having that circumstance in mind, and knowing the ways of his fellow-citizens,[3] begged them, in case they intended to take any action against him, to conduct the investigation while he was present, rather than bring forward in his absence charges inspired by malice. His enemies, however, thought it best to keep quiet for the present, since they knew that they could not harm him, and wait for the time of his departure, in order to attack him behind his back. And that is what they did; for as soon as they believed that he had reached Sicily, they charged him in his absence with profanation of sacred rites.

Because of this, a message was sent to Alcibiades in Sicily by the authorities, ordering him to return home and present his defence; and although he had high hopes of success in his mission, he was unwilling to disobey the order and embarked on the trireme that had been sent to bring him back. In this he was taken to Thurii in Italy, and there pondering deeply on the unbridled licence of his fellow-citizens, and their cruelty to men of high rank, he deemed it best to avoid the threatening storm; so he eluded his guards and made his escape, first to Elis, and

[3] Cf. i. 8 and ii. 8. 1.

then to Thebes. But as soon as he learned that he had been condemned to death and his property confiscated, and that the priests known as Eumolpidae[1] —an action for which there was precedent—had been compelled by the people to pronounce a curse upon him, and that to perpetuate the memory of that curse a copy had been inscribed upon a stele of stone and set up in a public place, he went to live in Lacedaemon.

There, as he himself used to declare, Alcibiades waged war, not against his country, but against his personal enemies, since they were also the enemies of their country; for although they knew that he could be of great service to the state, they had caused his banishment, having an eye rather to their own resentment than to the public welfare. Thus it was by his advice that the Lacedaemonians made 412 B.C. friends with the king of Persia, and then fortified Decelea in Attica and placed a permanent garrison 413 B.C. there, thus holding Athens in a state of siege. It was through him too that the Lacedaemonians separated the Ionian cities from their alliance with the Athenians, after which Sparta began to have great advantage in the war.

5. Yet by these services the Lacedaemonians were not so much attached to Alcibiades as they were led to fear and dislike him. Indeed, realizing the surpassing and many-sided ability of that most energetic of men, they feared that one day, led by love of country, he might turn from them and become reconciled with his own citizens. They therefore resolved to seek an opportunity for assassinating him. That design could not long be concealed from Alcibiades; for his keenness was

such that he could not be deceived, especially when he had made up his mind that he must be on his guard. Accordingly, he took refuge with Tissaphernes, one of the prefects of king Darius.[1] Having won the Persian's intimate friendship, and perceiving that the power of Athens was waning after the reverse in Sicily, while that of Lacedaemon was growing, he first conferred through intermediaries with Pisander, a general who had an army at Samos, hinting at the possibility of his return to Athens; for Pisander held the same political opinions as Alcibiades, being no friend to popular government but favouring the aristocrats. Meeting with no encouragement from him, Alcibiades was first 411 B.C.
received by the army through Thrasybulus, son of Lycus, and made general at Samos; later, with the support of Theramenes, he was restored by vote of the people and in his absence was given equal powers with Thrasybulus and Theramenes.

During the command of these three men such a change of fortune took place that the Lacedaemonians, who shortly before were flushed with success, now in terror sued for peace. In fact, they had lost 410 B.C.
five battles on land and three on the sea, and the latter had cost them two hundred triremes, which were captured and came into the hands of the enemy. Alcibiades, acting with his colleagues, had recovered Ionia, the Hellespont, and, besides, many Greek cities situated on the coast of Asia; several of these they had stormed, including Byzantium; but of quite as many they had secured the alliance by their good judgment in showing mercy to their prisoners. So, ladened with booty, and having enriched the army, they returned to Athens in triumph. 408 B.C.

6. The whole city went down to the Piraeus to meet them; but so strong and so universal was the desire of seeing Alcibiades that the people gathered about his trireme exactly as if he had come alone. In fact, the people were convinced that it was to him that their former disasters and their present successes were due. Consequently, they blamed themselves for the loss of Sicily [1] and the victories of the Lacedaemonians, because they had banished so great a man from the state. And they seemed to have grounds for that opinion; for no sooner had he been put in command of the army than the enemy had been outmatched by land and by sea. When Alcibiades disembarked, although Thrasybulus and Theramenes had shared in the command and had come to the Piraeus with him, it was Alcibiades alone that all the people escorted, and crowns of gold and fillets [2] were showered upon him everywhere, a thing which had never happened before except to victors at Olympia. He received these tokens of his fellow-citizens' devotion with tears in his eyes, as he recalled their cruelty in the past.

As soon as he arrived in the city, the assembly was convoked and he spoke in such terms that there was none so hard-hearted as not to weep at his lot and give vent to their anger against those who had caused his exile—just as if it had been

[1] *Amissus*, "loss," does not occur elsewhere, and perhaps some word or phrase has been lost; see the crit. note.

[2] All the editors, so far as I know, read either *coronis aureis aeneisque*, or *coronis laureis taeniisque*. Since Plutarch (*Alc.* 33) says that golden crowns were given him in the assembly, and since fillets (or ribbons; Suet. *Nero* 25. 2) were common offerings, while bronze crowns are not mentioned anywhere, I have read *coronis aureis taeniisque*; see crit. note.

another people, and not those who were then shedding tears, that had condemned him for impiety. Accordingly, his goods were restored to him at the state's expense, and the Eumolpidae, the same priests who had pronounced the curse upon him, were compelled to retract it, while the pillars upon which the curse had been inscribed were thrown into the sea.

7. But this joy of Alcibiades was of none too long duration. When all possible honours had been voted him and all the business of the state at home and abroad had been entrusted to him alone, to be managed as he wished, and he had asked that two colleagues, Thrasybulus and Adimantus, be given him and his request was granted, he set out for Asia with a fleet; and having been less successful at Cyme[1] than was hoped, he again fell into disfavour; for 407 B.C. the people thought that there was nothing that he could not accomplish. Consequently, they attributed all reverses to his fault, declaring that he had shown either negligence or treachery. And that was what happened in this instance; for they said that he had not tried to take Cyme, because he had been bribed by the king. Therefore I am convinced that nothing was more to his disadvantage than the excessive confidence in his ability and valour; for his countrymen feared him no less than they loved him, thinking that he might be carried away by good fortune and great power, and wish to become tyrant. The result of this was, that while he was away from Athens, they deprived him of his office and appointed another[2] in his place.

As soon as Alcibiades heard of that action, he

[2] Namely, Conon.

gave up any thought of returning home and went to Pactye, where he fortified three strongholds, Orni, Bizanthe and Neontichos; then gathering a band of followers, he was the first member of a Greek state to penetrate Thrace, thinking it more glorious to enrich himself by pillaging the barbarians than the Greeks. Through this enterprise he increased both in fame and in wealth, besides gaining the intimate friendship of some of the kings of Thrace.

8. In spite of all, Alcibiades could not renounce his love for his country; indeed, when Philocles, the Athenian general, had brought his fleet to anchor near Aegospotamoi, and Lysander, the Lacedaemonian commander, who was not far off, was making every effort to prolong the war, because money was being supplied to his countrymen by the Persian king, while the Athenians, at the end of their resources, had nothing left but their arms and their ships, Alcibiades came to the Athenian army. There, in the presence of the common soldiers, he began to plead with them, pledging himself, if they wished, to compel Lysander either to fight or sue for peace; he said that the Lacedaemonians did not wish a naval battle, because their land forces were stronger than their fleet; but that it would be easy for him to induce Seuthes, king of the Thracians, to drive Lysander from the land; and that would oblige the Spartan either to engage with his fleet or end the war.

Although Philocles[1] understood that what Alcibiades said was true, he nevertheless did not choose to

[1] There were five other generals, including Conon, but Philocles held the chief command on that day; Diodorus xiii. 106. 1.

do what he asked, because he saw that if the exile were taken back, he himself would be of no importance in the army; also that in the event of success he would be given no credit, while if any reverse was suffered, he alone would be held responsible. As he left him, Alcibiades said: "Since you do not wish victory for your country, I give you this bit of advice; do not keep your naval camp near the enemy; for there is reason to fear that the lack of discipline of your soldiers may give Lysander an opportunity of crushing your army." And he was not mistaken; for when Lysander had learned through scouts that a great part of the Athenian soldiers had gone ashore to pillage, leaving the ships almost empty, he did not let the chance for action slip, and by his attack he brought the whole war to an end.

9. But Alcibiades, thinking that after the defeat of the Athenians he was not altogether safe in his present residence, withdrew far into Thrace and went into hiding beyond the Propontis, thinking that there his existence might most easily be concealed. But he was mistaken; for as soon as the Thracians learned that he had come there with a large amount of money, they laid a trap for him; and they were successful in carrying off what he had brought with him, although they could not take the man himself. Then, perceiving that no place in Greece was safe for him because of the power of the Lacedaemonians, he took refuge in Asia with Pharnabazus, whom he so captivated by his personal charm, that he became the Persian's dearest friend. In fact Pharnabazus gave him Grynium, a stronghold of Phrygia, from which he received a yearly revenue of fifty talents.

Alcibiades, however, was not contented with his present lot, nor could he endure the idea that Athens was vanquished and enslaved to the Lacedaemonians. In consequence, all his thoughts were set upon freeing his country. It was clear to him, however, that he could accomplish nothing without the aid of the Persian king,[1] and for that reason he desired to win his friendship. And he felt confident of so doing, if only he could have the opportunity of meeting him. For he knew that the king's brother Cyrus was secretly planning to make war upon Artaxerxes with the help of the Lacedaemonians, and he perceived that if he should give information of that plot, he would win great gratitude.

10. At the very time that Alcibiades was making this plan and urging Pharnabazus to send him to the king, Critias and the other tyrants of Athens had sent trusty messengers to Asia, to inform Lysander that unless he got rid of Alcibiades, none of the arrangements which he had made at Athens [2] would be permanent. Therefore, if he wished what he had done to be lasting, he must try to capture the fugitive. These threats disturbed the Laconian, who made up his mind that he must deal more decidedly with Pharnabazus; he therefore threatened to renounce the agreement between the king and the Lacedaemonians,[3] unless Pharnabazus would deliver Alcibiades into his hands alive or dead. The satrap could not hold out against him, and preferred to do violence to the laws of humanity rather than see the king's power lessened.

Pharnabazus therefore sent Susamithres and Bagaeus to kill Alcibiades, while he was in Phrygia and was preparing to go to the king. These emis-

saries secretly instructed those who dwelt near the place where Alcibiades then was to slay him. They, however, did not dare to attack him openly, but by night piled wood about the house in which he slept and set fire to it, in order to destroy in that way a man whom they had no hope of being able to overcome by arms. But when Alcibiades was awakened by the crackling flames, although his sword had been filched from him, he seized a dagger [1] belonging to a friend; for he had with him a guest-friend from Arcadia, who had always refused to leave him.[2] This man Alcibiades ordered to follow him, and catching up whatever clothing there was at hand, he threw it upon the fire and dashed through the raging flames. When the barbarians saw that he had escaped the fire, they hurled weapons at him from a distance and thus killed him; then they took his head to Pharnabazus. But a woman who used to live with him covered the corpse with one of her robes and burned it in the fire which consumed the house, the very fire that had been designed to burn the occupant alive. Thus Alcibiades met his end at the age of about forty years.[3] 404 B.C.

11. Although his reputation has been assailed by many writers, Alcibiades has been highly praised by three authoritative historians: Thucydides, who belonged to the same period, Theopompus, who was born somewhat later than he, and Timaeus. These last two, who are strongly inclined to abuse, somehow agree in praising that one man. For it is they that are my authority for what I have previously [4] written about him, as well as for the following appraisement: although he was a native of Athens, most

[4] In chapters 1 and 2.

magnificent of cities, he surpassed all his fellow-citizens in the elegance and distinction of his manner of life. When he was banished and went to Thebes, he so adapted himself to the ways of that city that no one could equal him in bodily strength and endurance (for the Boeotians as a whole aim to excel in strength of body rather than in keenness of intellect). At Lacedaemon, where custom assigned the greatest merit to endurance, this same man cultivated austerity to such a degree that he surpassed all the Lacedaemonians in the plainness of his table and the simplicity of his life. Among the Thracians, a people given to drunkenness and lust, he surpassed even the Thracians in those vices. He came to the Persians, where the highest renown was gained by being a daring hunter and an extravagant liver, and there he so adapted himself to their customs that even the natives were filled with admiration of his success in these things. It was in this way that he held the first rank wherever he lived, as well as being greatly beloved. But enough of him; let us pass to the other men.